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ABSTRACT

This compilation of commentaries underscores the belief that the essence of individualized instruction lies in the implementation of a variety of alternative structures activated by shared teaching roles. The remarks focus on several topics which include a description of a self-instructional course in Japanese, computer-assisted instruction in foreign languages, a short bibliography on individualizing instruction, textbook selection, and a discussion of the nature of individualized instruction. (RL)

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WEST CHESTER STATE COLLEGE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Individualization of Foreign Language Learning in America

II. SPRING, 1971

We hope it comes through loud and clear from the pages of this newsletter that the individualization of foreign language learning does not mean the elimination of structured teaching programs. We believe the very essence of individualization lies in a variety of alternative structures which are activated by the shared teaching roles.

The most active teacher in a truly individualized program must be the student himself, when he is able to control his own teaching because alternative structures offer him both the readiest route to objectives and the freedom to move in their direction. The structures teach a student, to a certain degree, how to learn.

The "teacher", too, in the old sense, is there to reorganize structure when necessary and to manage the learning processes. Even though he ceases to teach, in the old sense, he still carries out those vital and creative tasks he was often too busy to perform--good guidance, effective motivation, and careful, individual evaluation.

In traditional, teacher-led educational practices, we think we see some analogies to the waste and pollution of the physical environment which now arouse so much concern. We think we find this waste in widespread student failure, general non-attainment of performance goals, and the early loss of an essential excitement in foreign language learning.

We believe that individualization of foreign language learning, as a non-doctrinaire, grass-roots movement, offers at least a partial solution to some of the critical problems now facing the profession.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Tucson (Arizona) Educators Mobilize for Individualized Instruction

For the second year, Tucson Public School personnel have developed an inservice seminar to study aspects of independent or individualized learning by elementary and secondary pupils. In last year's seminar, liability and accountability (teacher as well as pupil) emerged as the chief teacher concerns.

This year's seminar series is presenting ideas which might develop into an integrated system of management guidelines for independent or individualized instruction in the schools of Arizona's largest school district (50,000 students). It is not a course on "what to do"--it is an opportunity to think together with about thirty-five teachers and administrators who have tried various ideas themselves.

The seminar series consists of eight sessions meeting every other Monday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. A session generally consists of a preliminary panel presentation and discussion which is followed by small-group question and response periods.

Session titles are:

1) The processes of responsibly creating a new learning environment.
2) The processes whereby students responsibly enter worthwhile independent study programs.
3) The processes of responsibly sustaining the new learning environment.
4) The process of cross-educator responsibility for guiding students.
5) Responsible uses of physical, material, and human resources to sustain the learning environment.
6) The processes of responsibly evaluating student and program strengths and weaknesses.
7) Provisions for modifying processes when necessary.
8) Summary and evaluation.

For further information contact:

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Self-Instruction in Japanese I and II Garden City Senior High School, Garden City, New York

For three years the Japanese language program at Garden City Senior High School has been a 100% individualized, highly successful program in which selected juniors and seniors have taught themselves, using textbooks, tapes or cassettes, and the services of native-speaking tutors. Official grades and credit are awarded only by examination conducted twice annually by an outside specialist. Since 1968, when the program was initiated as part of the "Neglected Language Program" (Dr. Peter Boyd-Bowman), the examiner has

been Dr. Eleanor H. Jorden, former director of the Japanese Division of the Foreign Service Institute.

Facilities

As basic text, students use Beginning Japanese, Parts I and II, by Dr. Jorden (Yale U. Press, 1962). For writing, they use Japanese Kana Workbook, by P. G. O'Neill (Kodansha International), a systematic text and practice book for learning the 96 kana signs of the Japanese syllabary. As a supplement, they employ A Manual of Japanese Writing, by Chaplin and Martin (Yale U. Press, 1967), a three-volume set teaching the 881 essential characters of Japanese.

For use at home, each student is loaned a complete set of Beginning Japanese tapes, recorded on 5" reels, 60-minute cassettes, and 30-minute dual-track cassettes. Other sets are available in the school library, the electronic classroom, and the foreign-language office-workroom.

For use at home, each student is also loaned a taperecorder. Taperecorders and cassette players are also available at the school and may be used anywhere, even outdoors.

Schedule

Each student is scheduled to use the facilities of the school for 1 and a half hours per week under the general supervision of the director, Daniel N. Perkins. The student is also required to work with a native tutor for at least one hour per week. All other study may take place at the convenience and option of the student, but a minimum 7 and one-half total work hours per week is expected.

The student is required to abide by whatever schedule he has arranged. He may change it at any time, however, if he notifies the director and if the change is recorded in the school's main office.

Implementation

The course is strictly audio-lingual. Reading and writing are begun after the student has acquired basic control of the spoken Japanese. Work on the acquisition of these skills starts only upon the recommendation of the examiner, rarely before the end of the first year.

The only English spoken is that which is called for in the text, and reading is limited to the "BJ" romanization.

The student follows the study procedures recommended in the text unless modified by the examiner and the director. The basic medium of instruction is the tape which the student imitates until he achieves automatic control. Chief concern is with what is said, not how it is said.

Correction and reinforcement is given by native-speaking tutors in conversational periods. These average 30-minutes, two and one-half times per week. In sustained, rapid conversation, only one to three students at a time may use a tutor's services. Two students per session has proved ideal, if the students are on the same unit of work.

The tutoring sessions provide motivation and enjoyment as well as invaluable practice. The program would be seriously impaired without them. It has proved best to select tutors as close as possible to the age of the students. Ideally, they have been tutors of college age. They are never teachers.

Students have considered the recommendations of the examiner and director and have set a realistic minimum for general credit. Provision has also been made for "Honors" credit and for additional academic credit. A grade of "B" must be maintained; a student who has earned a "C" is allowed one semester to raise his grade.

Students sign up for a unit test whenever they feel prepared. Tests are not supervised, and a test may be retaken if the student wishes and records that fact. The student listens to the recorded test and in turn records his answers on a second recorder. Each test lasts from 10 to 15 minutes.

In general, unit tests follow the pattern: 1) repetition or substitution; 2) free response; 3) interpretation (rendition in English of what has been said); and situations (explanations requiring variation in vocabulary and structure). The test items are heard only once and at normal or faster-than-normal speed.

The unit tests are checked by tutors. To permit his own evaluation of progress and problems, the student receives a rating. At times, unit test tapes are sent to the examiner for quality control and for suggestions to all concerned.

The Director

In addition to managing the program, producing tapes, etc., the chief responsibility of the director is to encourage students and to suggest devices and techniques for improving study procedures. He also assists in making and evaluating tapes for individual units.

Cost

Excluding services to the school otherwise available to students, the cost of the program to the school district is about $125 per student per year. This also covers the expense of tutors and examiners. All hardware employed in the program is the property of the language department. Originally partially funded by the Carnegie Corporation through the Division of Research of the State University of New York, the program is now operated exclusively by the Board of Education, Garden City, New York.

Evaluation

The students chosen for the program have consistently indicated preference for this type of study. They acknowledge occasional boredom and some tendency to waste time. On most counts, however, their judgments about the program are decidedly positive. For further information, contact:

Daniel N. Perkins, Chairman
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Computer-assisted Instruction in Foreign Languages
University of Illinois

For the past three years the Department of the Classics at the University of Illinois has been developing several computer-assisted Latin programs for use both in college and secondary school Latin classes. We have been using the PLATO system which is part of the Computer-based Education Research Laboratory. PLATO (an acronym for Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) utilizes a high-speed digital computer as the central control element for teaching a number of students simultaneously while allowing each student to proceed independently through the lesson material.

Let me list some of the advantages which we have observed in computer-assisted instruction on the PLATO system:

1) Each student must do each problem. He proceeds at his own rate of speed, answers each problem, and is judged according to his own work. Further refinement of the basic system can be made through the introduction of variable factors which allow the computer to keep track of individual performance and to design the particular lesson according to that performance. In this way each lesson, while emphasizing the same basic concepts, uniquely adapts itself to individual needs and abilities.

2) The student response is judged immediately. He cannot go on to the next problem until the current one is answered correctly. If he has difficulties, he may choose any one of a number of branching sequences which provide assistance.

3) The student may stop at the end of a lesson or at any point during it, and, whether he returns the next day, or the next week, or the next month, the computer will automatically return him to the lesson on which he was working.

4) Further personalization can be accomplished by having the computer "remember" the student's name and use it when giving instructions or remedial messages. Comments upon correct answers are also helpful.

5) It is also possible to allow the student the option to choose those areas in which he believes he ought to work, and within certain limits, to phrase the problems themselves.

6) The system allows the use of 35mm slides to visually demonstrate certain points.

7) Students tend to work about half again more rapidly on the computer than in a more conventional setting. Many students choose to repeat a lesson a second or third time and where this occurs there is a further increase in rapidity of performance and a markedly decreased error rate.

8) Testing can also become a learning experience in a way which is impossible in the conventional classroom. For example, several tries might be possible on the same question with each try receiving less credit. Indeed with CAI the entire notion of grading is called into question. One can write a program in such a way as to insure mastery and this an A for every student.

CAI will surely become one of the most important tools in the development of individualized instruction during the current decade.

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Changes Needed

One person cannot teach another anything of importance. All any teacher should do is to facilitate learning.

The story is told of the six year old child whose parents went to Paris to work and live. According to the story, after six months the six year old child had learned to speak French like a native six year old French child. It is said that had this child have had a French teacher, with traditional instruction, instead of only French playmates, he would not have learned so much French in four years as he learned in six months from this self-directed learning in a learning environment.

It is a well established fact that the longer a child is in school, from kindergarten to graduate school, the less of a self-motivated learner he becomes. If our schools were learning-centered instead of teaching-centered the opposite would be true in that the child would be just as eager to learn when he reached college as he was in the first grade. In many children we destroy something very precious, namely, their natural desire to learn.

There are, of course, individual exceptions, but our methods must be revolutionized if we are to improve the quality of education, K-12. Improving education is so very simple yet it is so very, very difficult. We must change completely our concept of the role of the teacher. We must change from being mere dispensers of knowledge to being facilitators of learning.

Dr. W. P. Shofstall
Superintendent of Public Instruction
State of Arizona
Phoenix, Arizona

A Short Bibliography for Individualizing Foreign Language Instruction

Introduction

Interest in individualizing foreign language instruction is mounting rapidly, as is indicated by recent conference topics and the increased number of related articles appearing in the journals during the past year. Certainly individualized foreign language instruction has been going on for years in schools offering third and fourth year classes to small enrollments. Teachers have varied their literary and reading assignments according to the ability and interest of their students. However, current thinking is a great deal more inclusive than just assigning different or additional readings.

New concepts or new interpretations that are contributing to the increased interest and feasibility of individualizing foreign language instruction are:

1. The schism between the audio-linguists and the traditionalists that flourished during the late 50's and 60's is over. The best of both approaches is widely used and advocated by foreign language teachers today.

2. The traditional size class of 20-30 students may not be the most efficient grouping procedure. Learning activity should determine group size.

3. By using behavioral objectives for entering and terminal behavior, and criterion reference testing, students can be measured.

4. The measuring of achievement by proficiency levels attained, rather than the number of hours or years spent in the classroom, is more realistic.

5. Programmed instruction can be used as a part of the program and is not necessarily equated with self-instruction.

6. Technology may hold the keys to liberation and personalization of instruction, and is not a teacher replacement as was feared when it first appeared on the teaching scene.

7. The role of the teacher is no longer lecturer and principal presenter of information, but a teacher is a resource person, guide and counselor to the student to help him select and attain his objectives.

8. Team planning and team teaching utilizes the specialities of each teacher to the students' advantage.

All of the above changes in thinking place the student at the center of his own education. The student is free to make it relevant, to regulate his own time, in many cases choose the route he will follow, and is <u>responsible</u> for his own education. It is an American ideal that all students are entitled to all the education they are capable of receiving. To date individualizing instruction is the most promising approach to this ideal.

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Text Adoption Policies Inhibit Individualization

Basic text book adoption or "approval" practices may seriously inhibit the true individualization of instruction in over one third of the United States. The same state laws and regulations which often prohibit a multi-media approach also can inhibit teacher prescription of multi-facted learning materials.

Eighteen or more of the United States currently prescribe either a single text or multiple listing of "approval" of basic texts for secondary schools. Largely located in the south and west, those states once adopted this restrictive procedure to insure uniformity of educational opportunity. Students may be legally and socially equal but modern educators accept the premise that each individual approaches learning with widely varying needs, strategies, and expectations. True individualization of instruction is no longer a theoretical dream but a practical reality in today's schools.

Yet in many states, the foreign language teacher who accepts the challenge of improved education through individualization may find himself seriously inhibited by text prescriptions.

A particular text best suited for a student's needs may not appear on the approved State Adoption List. Perhaps it is too new--perhaps too avant garde or too "conservative" for the text selection committee. Specifications on size, binding and content prevent excellent multimedia programs from even entering the adoptive competition. A particular text may have been judged sixth or seventh in a state which only lists five. Indeed, it may even be a programmed text--intended to be used only once--and therefore ineligible since it is not "durable" but a "workbook." What chance does Computer-Assisted-Instruction have?

Can an individual teacher circumvent state law? Probably, but not ethically. This is, at best, unprofessional; at worst, illegal. Can the basic text be supplemented to a high degree? Certainly, but the school administrator may be reluctant to dedicate funds to "supplementary" materials in amounts several times the cost of a basic text. The concerned teacher in these states indeed faces a real problem in a society where circumvention of law has already led to tragic community attitudes.

States which maintain uniform basic text adoption should be encouraged by both state and national foreign language organizations to either rescind or revise this portion of their school code. Illustrative multimaterials learning systems need to demonstrate the inadequacy of a single basic text for all learners. Once again foreign language educators have the rationale and the ability to offer convincing demonstration in support of an overdue curriculum reform which can benefit all areas of public education.

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Individualized Foreign Language Instruction: What Does It Mean?

Foremost in the concept of individualized instruction must be the notion of instruction. Regardless of the type of educational system, the foreign language teacher has the responsibility to be able to teach a language and something about the culture in which it is spoken. What distinguishes what is taught under an individualized system from what is taught under other systems is a function of the recognition by the teacher of the lack of any necessary causal link between what the teacher teaches and what students learn. Few teachers would deny that students have an uncanny ability to learn on their own what we would never expect them to learn, and not to learn at all what we have "taught" them so masterfully.

This writer views individualized foreign language instruction as a philosophy of education which may be superimposed upon practically any foreign language classroom, regardless of the "methodology" followed, regardless of

the nature of the textbooks, regardless of the number of students or staff in the program.

There are four basic characteristics to an individualized foreign language program.

A. Students should be free to proceed through their curricular materials at their own pace.
B. Students are tested on their materials at given intervals, but only when they are prepared to be tested, and only on materials on which they expect to be tested. This implies that in any given class period it is rare that more than several students be tested on the same material.
C. When students need help to progress in their learning--i.e., when for some reason--they work individually with their teacher, or with some other resource person in the classroom, in a tutorial manner. The function of the teacher here is to "compensate" the students for the impediment to his learning by giving him the needed assistance which enables him to resume self-instruction.
D. Students always know the nature of their learning task and know what they must demonstrate, and the degree of accuracy required, for them to receive credit for their work and be able to move ahead in their materials.

It is important to note that the above definition is really far from restrictive, and is significant as well for what it does not insist upon as constituting the essentials of individualization in the foreign language classroom. For example:

A. It is not necessary for all students to work with different texts, nor is it necessary for a school to purchase a "complete set" of dozens and dozens of different texts. Many students may be taking a foreign language for similar reasons and with similar goals in mind. Such learners may well profit from reading the same materials and participating in the same activities.
B. It is not necessary for the teacher to explain everything separately to each individual student. Pity a poor teacher who tries to explain the use of the direct object to thirty different students on thirty separate occasions! First of all, not all of those thirty students will ever need that explanation to function adequately. Some might master the material better on their own; others may need twice the attention to a given topic which the teacher would normally give under the methodology of "teaching-to-the-middle-of-the-class." Secondly, by grouping students according to their needs and abilities, teachers can give "group explanations" where needed with a higher degree of success than usually happens when the whole class receives the explanation whether prepared for it or not.
C. It is not necessary for all students to work individually all the time. Language, as a system of communication is not mastered in vacuo. The point here, however, is that students may frequently learn to communicate at least as well with other students--

especially with more advanced learners who can offer them assistance--as they can learn in forced "conversations" with their teacher. Grouping students on the basis of ability for some activities, and on the basis of interest for other activities, often solves many of the "learning problems" which teachers could rarely solve any better, if as well.

D. Few students--indeed, probably almost none--need to be counseled out of foreign language study because of lack of "aptitude." If students are allowed to work at their own pace and receive credit for whatever they accomplish with sufficient accuracy, no one, except possibly the student who is physically or psychologically handicapped in some way, is incapable of learning something of personal value in the foreign language classroom!

E. It is not necessary to adopt any special grading system, although this writer can not stress too strongly the tremendous disadvantages in a system which carves up the notion of "proficiency" into as many fine "letter grades." The writer recommends an alternative system of student evaluation which eliminates the possibility of failure.

F. It is not necessary to have any special kind of school scheduling. An individualized program can function in the most rigidly inflexible schedule, although a schedule with some flexibility offers many academic and personal advantages.

There are still many issues in individualizing foreign language instruction which need urgent consideration. If teachers are to individualize their instruction, the vital questions of "how to do it" will have to be faced. It is to such questions that we must turn our attention as a profession.

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